

DRAMA CRITIQUE

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A FAITH THAT FATHERS FINE DELIGHT

T. S. Eliot described his poetic effort as a "raid on the inarticulate." Every fine art is, indeed, a raid on the inarticulate — an attempt to capture and imitate "form," which is most actual in the hylomorphic composition of reality.

Every fine art is an imitation—not an imitation as a reproduction of things, but an imitation as a manifestation of form. The artistic disposition of the material elements should not conform with photographic exactness to the object imitated, but should rather illumine the material with the beauty of form or with the brilliance of truth apprehended in the object.

In other words, all fine art involves a worthwhile idea — an idea with which the artist molds matter. This "new creation" is termed "beautiful" because it stimulates *delight* in the beholder. Painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, and dramatists all have kinship in this, namely, in their efforts to produce beautiful imitations of reality.

But each fine art is concerned with a different segment of reality. Whereas the dancer is concerned with the imitation of motion, the painter with line and color, and the musician with sound, the dramatist and the interpretative dramatic artists are concerned with the imitation of *human action*. Although human action as it occurs in the flux of time is seen as a series of occurrences, the dramatist imitates human action not as a reproduction of occurrences but as a manifestation of form.

In his essay, "The Timeless World of a Play," Tennessee Williams ably expressed this purpose of the playwright:

Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence. . . . In a play, time is arrested in the sense of being confined. By a sort of legerdemain events are made to remain *events*, rather than being reduced so quickly to mere *occurrences*. The audience can sit back in a comforting dusk to watch a world which is flooded with light and in which emotion and action have a dimension and dignity that they would likewise have in real existence, if only the shattering intrusion of time could be locked out.¹

"Locking out the shattering intrusion of time" in order to "snatch the eternal out of the desperately fleeting," in order to "make a raid on the inarticulate" — this is the purpose of the dramatist, and to this extent at least, Mr. Williams shares our Aristotelian concept of art as an illumination or manifestation of form, a flooding of matter with light.

¹ *Theatre Arts*, XXXIX (May, 1955), 96.

We part company, however, with Tennessee Williams, with William Inge, and their kind when we come to a consideration of the source of this illumination or of the manner of snatching the eternal from the desperately fleeting. To utilize the terminology and, to some extent, the thesis of Francis Fergusson in his *The Idea of a Theatre*, the histrionic sensibility or the mimetic imitation of action can only give delight when illumined by some organization of sensibility in society whether that organization be the myth of the Greek tragedy, the Christian social order as inherited by Shakespeare, or the conception of action as reason in the age of Racine or as passion in the age of Wagner. According to Mr. Fergusson, the modern-day disorganization of sensibility, the wasteland devoid of spiritual vitality, has robbed us of a living theatre.

... because one cannot quite escape the fact that drama is in some sense an imitation of action, or because this art must live immediately in a public awareness or not live at all — the fact is that some basis in reality must be established. The audience must know, with reference to something it does believe, where its make-believe, or 'suspension of disbelief,' is to start. Or you may put it that behind every play which has lived (however small and knowing its audience, however perfect its form) some acceptable idea of a theatre is implicit. Since Cocteau, Obey, and Eliot were seeking precisely to expand the awareness of the audience, to transcend the narrow shrewdness of the modern city, and to comprehend human life in the wider perspective of ancient sources, the question of the scene of human life which they established on the modern stage as the basis of their art is of crucial importance. Each of them solves this problem and answers this question of the idea of a theatre differently. And no wonder: for beyond the problem of tapping the roots of our culture for the revivification of the actual theatre is the general cultural problem in its thousand forms, the preoccupation of Joyce, Mann, Yeats, and Eliot himself. . . . What is the relation between the divided modern awareness and that 'organization of the sensibility' which we feel in Shakespeare, Dante, and Sophocles? We do not know; the context in which modern poetic drama struggles to be born is of unmanageable complexity.²

Now, some of our modern playwrights, such as O'Neill, Odets, Williams, and Inge, possess histrionic sensibility in the first order of greatness. But they are victims of that divided modern awareness which provides no organization of sensibility as an illuminating background to flood human action with light. Their magnificent mimetic imitations are devoid of any reference to a common, central idea. For example, in *The Rose Tattoo*, there is no point of reference beyond the Freudian symbolism of the rose and the goat: the former, the symbol of eroticism; the latter, the symbol of sexual promiscuity. Both symbols, by the way, seem to be borrowed from T. S. Eliot who will have to pardon Williams inasmuch as he, Eliot, has done

² Francis Fergusson, *The Idea of a Theatre* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 195-196.

a lot of borrowing himself, explaining it away with the dictum: "Great poets steal; inferior poets imitate." Not only are these symbols used by Williams in an almost juvenile way—the rose permeating hair oil, clothing, and paper flowers—but they involve no worthwhile idea and provide no genuine illumination.

Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote of "the fine delight that fathers thought."³ Actually, in the play as in any work of fine art, it is beauty—the splendor of thought—intuited through the senses which is the father of delight. Since Mr. Williams' perception of human action has no point of reference in meaningful thought, it is incapable of fathering beauty and delight. To quote his essay again: "... as far as there exists any kind of empiric evidence, there is no way to beat the game of *being* against *non-being*, in which non-being is the predestined victor on realistic levels."⁴ No one can beat the game of being and non-being who seeks empiric evidence to the exclusion of Faith. Only an acceptance—a taking-for-granted—of Catholic Faith or of a social order organized on principles of this Faith can give the organization of sensibility so desperately needed. The disorganization of sensibility has not flooded the human action of drama with light but rather it has splattered it with mud. As Maurice Zolotov, critic for *Theatre Arts*, observed: "At one time playwrights saw sex through love. Now we have the nauseating spectacle of love seen through the eyes of sex."⁵

Art is not a god; it is not gratuitous; it is rooted in reality—and there is only one center of reality, only one splendor of truth—"the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Faith is no substitute for technical proficiency in the composition of a play nor is it, in the majority of instances, the content of a play. But a playwright without Faith very often, too often, fails to do justice to human action because he has no certain point of reference from which to illumine that action. When an artist denies or ignores the order of intellectual certitude and moral rectitude, he sacrifices the liberty of great artistry for the license and slavery of intellectual confusion and moral degeneracy. He can then shed no light—only smog. If audiences are to experience the fine delight which fathers thought, then the playwright must first be in possession of a thought which fathers fine delight. He must be in possession of a thought which orders reality in whole or in part; or at least, which does not destroy the order of reality by snuffing out the light of the eternal.

A play is not subject to the norms of morality from the technical point of view nor from the viewpoint of artistic composition any more than a cabinet is subject to the moral law. Unlike a cabinet, however, a play interprets human action and human action is never neutral in the realm of morality. Rather, human action—that is, what happens—can be illuminated by the splendor of form only when the playwright interprets it in view of what ought to happen.

³ *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Bridges (1930), p. 69.

⁴ Williams, *loc. cit.*

⁵ "The Season on and off Broadway," *Theatre Arts*, XXXIX (May, 1955), 22.

The art of the playwright, moreover, is a habit inhering in man — a man subject to God and to His moral law. Hence, the playwright — and his interpreters — cannot produce any object which will lead the generality of mature individuals into sin or into temptation to sin. Not only would it then be better for the playwright to have a millstone tied about his neck, but his play would also fail to fulfill the definition of art since it would not illumine human action, but would becloud or besmirch it to the disgust rather than to the delight of the moral beholder.

In the technical composition of the play, as such — in the arrangement of the inciting force, complication, climaxes, and crises—the playwright is subject only to the canons of his art of playmaking. But in his illumination of human action, the playwright is subject to the judgment of the moralist; for, even if the illumination does not predicate a thesis or theory, a play will be immoral and conducive to sin on the part of all concerned if it assumes immorality as a background for human action. Again, it may be that the assumed background is partly objectionable; the playwright, perhaps, may produce an excellent though not a perfect play. But, if this partly objectionable illumination has been intentional, the artist cannot absolve himself of the responsibility for the effect it will have upon others.

Moreover, if the playwright chooses to be didactic as Ibsen and Shaw have been didactic, then he subjects himself by a double title to the judgment of morals. Although a play is meant to delight rather than to instruct, some playwrights, as well as some poets, have chosen to delight through instruction. If the thesis play is chosen as his medium, then the playwright has the added obligation of teaching a message which is in accord with or, at least, which does not contradict eternal truth.

Now, granted that the playwright has a moral obligation stemming from his artistic function of illuminating human action, may the playwright portray evil? The answer is that he may certainly portray evil under two conditions: first, since the playwright usually deals in the conflict of good and evil human action, he will of necessity portray evil, but the evil must be illuminated as evil; secondly, the playwright, as a man subject to the moral law, is obliged to portray evil in such a way as would not allure the majority of mature playgoers to evil.

To be sure, the playwright is not bound to portray good as triumphing over evil since this is not always the case in human action. But a dramatist, projecting, as he does, human action against a background of organized sensibility, must so portray the triumph of evil over good that he will leave the beholder or reader with a sense of "oughtness"; in this instance, of "ought-not-to-be." In the words of St. Paul: "Love is not glad when injustice triumphs."

I do not accept Maritain's position that the seeming dichotomy of art and prudence is resolved only in the contemplative. One need only be a Christian of conviction, it seems to me, in order to illuminate human action

with the splendor of form. I do not mean to say that one must be a Christian in the full sense of the word. One must be, as it were, at least *naturaliter* Christian, that is to say, like the Greek dramatists, one must have at least a sense of beatitude which alone gives any splendor or beauty to the fleeting happiness and misery of human action.

Mr. Williams has said that "the great and only possible dignity of man lies in his power to choose certain moral values by which to live as steadfastly as if he too, like a character in a play, were immured against the corrupting rush of time."⁶ All too often, however, our secular playwrights, such as Mr. Williams, are not immured against the corrupting rush of time, but surrender themselves and their characters to it — are pulverized and disfigured by time — because the modern playwright, with a few notable exceptions enumerated above, has not steadfastly chosen those values of moral certitude which leave him free to see and illuminate human action in its true tragedy and in its essential beauty.

Gabriel Stapleton, S.D.S.
President

MIND, EMOTION, AND WAGNER'S DREAM

By GILBERT ROXBURGH, O.P.

On a high, green hill in eastern Bavaria, a mile above the town of Bayreuth, there stands a monument given us by the century just past — a temple to a strange religion, a cult born out of the pain and longing of nineteenth-century romanticism, a shrine to an art-medium deified. Dead and all but entombed, the adherents of this faith have been compelled to take their religion less seriously, if only to survive. For all that, the mystique of this pristine religion casts a long shadow reaching even to our day.

The "temple" is the *Festpielhaus*. To every appearance it is an ordinary, somewhat antiquated theatre. But to those who make their pilgrimage here with devotion, it is, preeminently, a world center for Wagnerianism, the aesthetic religion founded by the composer, dramatist, and—yes, let us say it—press agent, who flourished here three-quarters of a century ago, Richard Wagner. Upon the stage here at Bayreuth, Wagner produced not merely his own works—items loosely pertaining to the operatic genre, but an entire dream world—a gigantic fiction, an intensely mystical portrait of life, a vision that for a time, thirty years either side of the turn of the century, stirred a world-wide cultus of believers who somehow never noticed the shaky and unstable foundations upon which this dream world was built.

The god was art; music-drama was its name. The prophet was Richard Wagner himself, the musician-poet who demanded of the world that he must have his own theatre for a temple, his own clergy of musicians and singers, his own congregation of devotees — and the world gave all these to him, after a gigantic advertising scheme which snowballed through five continents. In his own lifetime, Wagner saw rise up at Bayreuth what was, for 1876, the most progressive, most modern, most versatile stage in the world — all for him and for his music-dramas. There was no stage effect that could not be reproduced, no touch of realism which could not be effected by the equipment of the *Festpielhaus*; every possibility would be explored in the course of Wagner's career there. Yes, the world built it all for him and for his music-drama. Little by little, the prophet became indistinguishable from his deity, so that one came to confound them: art was Wagner, Wagner was the music-drama, and all were one. But today, much of the haze over Bayreuth has settled. With the passage of almost thirty years of war, the Wagnerian disciple has turned away, disenchanted. His faith in the content of the Wagnerian Dream is not so strong as it once was. Doubts have crept in, until the mystical approach to art that so characterized Bayreuth has been replaced by a more potent showmanship.

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Excessive realism upon which Wagner himself doted has given way to the symbolist and expressionist techniques so much a part of modern theatrical staging.

We spoke of the Wagnerianism of fifty or sixty years ago as the flowering of a new religion, with Bayreuth as its shrine. This is not to overstate the case of the Wagnerian Dream nearly so much as it might seem. In Wagner's time, a deliberate attempt was made and perpetuated to saturate the *Festpielhaus* in mysticism. In those earlier days, for instance, silence was imposed on the audience. Curtain calls—even conventional applause—were forbidden. The orchestra, completely out of sight of the audience, was required to tune up in an antechamber before filing into the crowded, unventilated area under the stage. There was even an Easter liturgy, *Parsifal*, for special production on Good Friday. The audience entered, reverently witnessed a performance, and went away feeling they had done their religious duty. As the sacrificial liturgy of the ancient Jews could only be carried out at the Temple of Jerusalem, so at first was this liturgy reserved for the *Festpielhaus* until its copyright expired at the end of the nineteenth century and *Parsifal* liturgies became multiplied over the face of the globe.

Today, the pedestal of the prophet still stands, though the wreaths and laurels of an adoring world so carefully preserved there wear the look of other days. Until a score or more years ago, the shrine was carefully tended by Wagner's intransigent widow, Cosima Wagner, who maintained Bayreuth just as it had always been, but now the world of Richard and Cosima no longer seems to have a place in this torn, disillusioned world. There is an odor of outdatedness about it all. The bronzed Wagner, so carefully preserved, is a little stained; the stonework of Bayreuth, a little chipped and yellowed.

And yet, in altered form, Richard Wagner lives on. Those upon whom the prophet's robe has been bestowed—who rule at Bayreuth—have almost completely revamped stagings of the Wagnerian repertory. Wagner's ghost still walks. His ten major works are permanent fixtures in every leading opera house in Europe and in the Americas—a larger representation than that of any other single composer. To Toscanini, he is among the world's three greatest composers. Paderewski considered Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* the greatest creation of the human mind. Wagner probably thought so himself; he would have admitted that it was he who perfected the newest and most vital of all art forms—the music-drama. It was not opera, though it was sometimes called opera. It was an entirely different approach to the fusion of music and drama. To comprehend the Wagnerian Dream in the music-drama demands a thorough education in Wagnerian symbolism and in the culture of the *leitmotif*. The casual opera-goer attending a music-drama without this orientation has as little penetration into its meaning as an uninitiated onlooker has in the meaning of the Catholic Mass.

The music-drama was Wagner's blend, synthesis, integration of all the other arts—all the other *lesser* arts, Wagner would be quick to point out. It was the fulfillment of all man's aesthetic aspirations. It was drama, first and foremost. Music embellished the drama, but not in the ordinary sense. There were no set numbers, as in opera, no arias, no choruses or recitatives, as such. All was one fully integrated dramatic action. The sound never stopped, or never seemed to stop. It went flowing on and on in "continuous melody," a canonized Wagnerian phrase, hesitating here and there perhaps over a final cadence like a bird, but then going on, never stopping until the crashing chords marked the apogee and the end of the drama. Such was the theory.

The text was not so much to be sung as to be declaimed. The vocal part in the Wagnerian music-drama followed the cadences, the natural rise and fall, of human speech. Unlike Italian or French opera—or the common convention of ordinary song, for that matter—where the voice carries the melody and the ensemble provides the accompaniment, in the music-drama envisioned by Wagner, the melodic line was more often found in the orchestra, which, far from merely accompanying the singing voice, was rather accompanied by it.

The stories employed in the Wagnerian music-drama were eclectic borrowings from the heroic mythologies of northern Europe. To the already explosive development of these mythological tales, Wagner added his own poetic dramaturgy—short, terse lines of verse which caught up the hearer's own emotional pattern and urged it on expectantly to some great climax of passion. The orchestration added a vividly dramatic commentary. The most pedestrian of human activities portrayed on the stage were invested through poetry and music of passion with an ecstatic quality altogether absent from such activities in everyday life. No chance for theatrical effect was overlooked. A character in the Wagnerian Dream could not so much as tie his shoe or hitch up his trousers without an utterance of short, breathless dialogue and a sudden burst of rapture from somewhere beneath the floorboards. In Wagner's world of the theatre, one could not say such trivialities as "Nice weather, isn't it?" or "How do you do?" There always had to be this mist of mystique, of ecstasy. There could be no bland interchange of insignificant small talk in the Wagnerian Dream; there always had to be echoes and re-echoes of past or future emotional states somehow relevant, poured forth by excited singers and by an enlarged ensemble pumping away in the pit beneath the stage. The perfection of the use of the *leitmotif* was a very important element in the Wagnerian Dream. The musical tag or theme was attached to various characters, events, or abstract ideas of the drama. As the plot unfolded, these tags, in different combinations and developments, would give a particular focus to this or that scene.

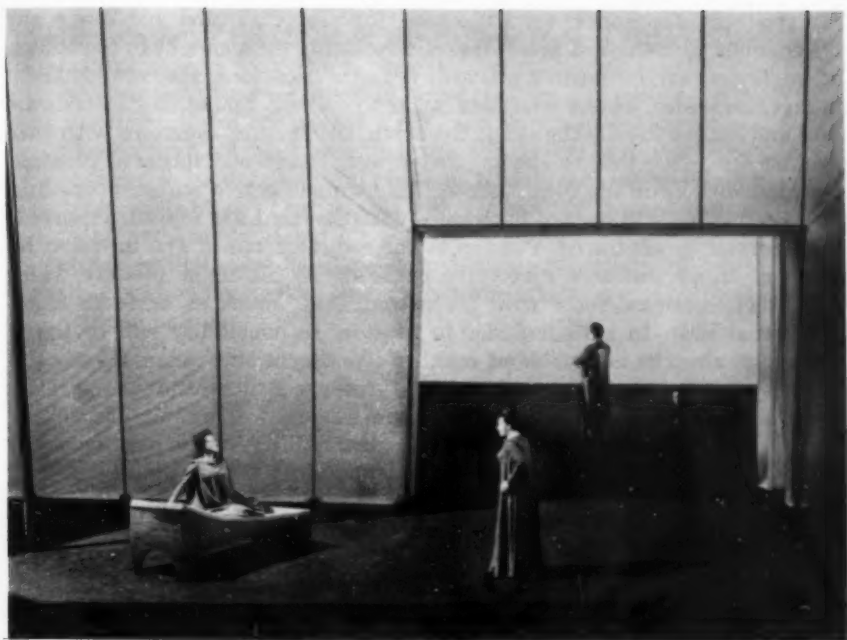
The advance of the machine in the last quarter of the nineteenth century had unlimited influence on the theatre of the time. Wagner, a child of the age, was struck by the possibilities inherent in the use of

mechanical devices to represent dramatic effects with the utmost realism. The staging at Bayreuth was calculated to take the audience's breath away. Whole sets came and went in seconds—a realism rather ill at ease in the notably unreal world of the Wagnerian Dream. Characters appeared and disappeared in an instant, if the machinery was working right, or changed from humans into serpents or toads. Rhine-maidens pawed the air in swimming postures up and down the height and breadth of the stage, and one who could pass without a smile through the potpourri of stage animals—swans, dragons, horses—could not fail to be impressed at the disconcerting phenomenon of the stage dropping away from the surface of the earth into the rocky grottoes of the underworld. But the stage machinery was not always in perfect working order; ironically, as the dependability of the equipment increased, interest in realistic staging decreased.

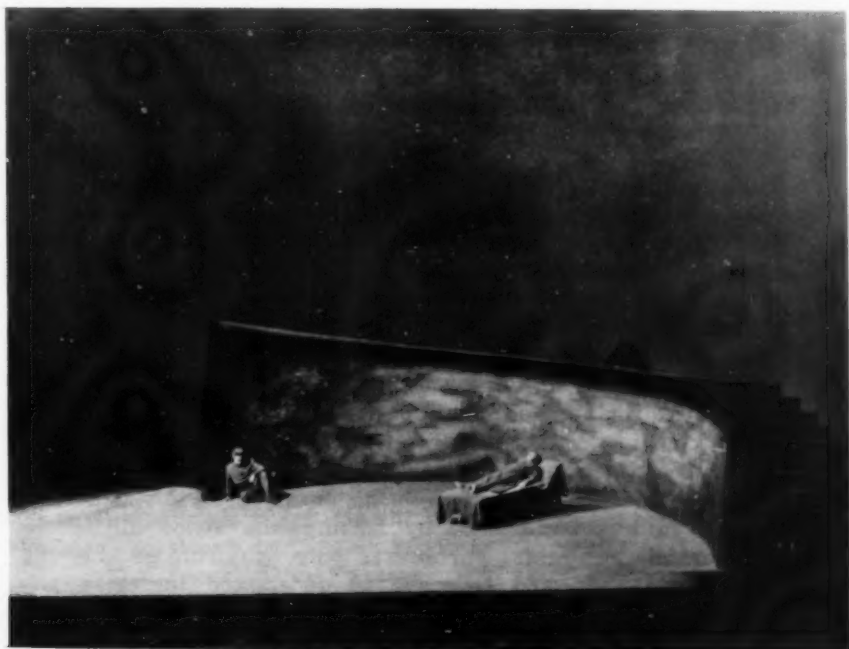
At Bayreuth today, the productions, such as the Wieland Wagner staging of *Tristan und Isolde*, have turned almost completely away from realism. This was the extraordinary apparatus used in projecting the dream of Richard Wagner. Borrowing the mechanical devices available for his illusions and effects; absorbing from the musical point of view a little from Weber, a little from Berlioz, quite a bit from Beethoven and the philosophy of the romantics, Wagner talked himself and thousands of disciples into thinking that Richard Wagner had climbed to the very summit of the Mount of the Arts. The music-drama was the culmination of them all—embracing in one great art form—sculpture, painting, design, mechanics, architecture, song, poetry, acting. All of these arts would achieve their apotheosis in Wagner's Dream.

What should be portrayed in this new art form?—human life, reality, the aspirations and hopes and desires of the human soul, man's combat for happiness, his victories and defeats when pitted against the universe? These are the realities almost any dramatist would suggest. And Wagner? Sir Edward Elgar said: "There is music in the air; there is music all around us." For Richard Wagner, it was not music that filled the air so much as it was passion, the impulsive principle of the universe which alone moved men in their deeds and in their discoveries—strong emotion, violent passion, set free from the dominion of mind and reason. True, many artists have turned to passion as their chief marketable commodity. But here there is a difference. The merchandise is clearly labeled, expensively and attractively packaged, so that even when you know the contents and are apprised that at base they are cheap and shoddy, you thrill at the delight of its opening.

Emotion is the heavily charged atmosphere of the Wagnerian vision. It is a mist that penetrates every realistic stage device, that clouds in passion every commonplace exclamation or deed. Wagner, undisciplined in his own extremely emotional life, saw in his vision of the world and of reality—man the stranger and wanderer, standing alone in an alien land with immense, but unrealizable, desires. Man has a dim and vague thirst



Bayreuth, *Tristan und Isolde*, Act I: Birgit Nilsson, Grace Hoffman, Wolfgang Windgassen, Gustav Neldlinger.



Act III: Wolfgang Windgassen and Gustav Neldlinger.

—Photos Courtesy of Opera News

for goodness, for honor, for happiness, for peace. Passion and death are his enemies. Somehow, it is a foregone conclusion that, caught in the eddies of world passion, his desires will always be inefficacious. Man stands alone in an alien world, as one who does not truly belong. Something in his own soul and nature itself—the skies, the earth, the spring—conspire with fate against him, each thing radiating from itself heady whirlpools of passion, catching him up in his own feelings, his own subjective states, propelling him against his will toward dangerous destinies that are feared, abhorred, but necessarily embraced. Passion is the motive force of the universe he lives in. Man's immense error, the cause of all his inner anxiety, is to fight this emotional force with his reason. Man, much as he fears to do it, must submit. In his surrender to passion, responsibility will be taken from him, since he is capable of nothing else except surrender. If only the soul might find rest, reach the end of these conflicts and heartbreaks and disappointments that war within him! Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" finds a response in Wagner, who would, in effect, speak of tranquillity longed-for in emotion.

In Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy, Toto, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion, in entering the Emerald City, had to put on green glasses. Thereafter, everything and everyone they saw within the city walls, no matter what their tint in objective reality, were seen in terms of green. Something of the same thing is true of the vision of Richard Wagner. To enter the Wagnerian dream world, one must wear special glasses. Thereafter, all objective reality, no matter what meaning or being it may have in itself, is seen through the prism of emotion.

Wagner, in his autobiography, *Mein Leben*, states in rather clear and precise terms his vision of the theatre. It is an accurate description of Wagner's Dream:

There are many people even nowadays, who, in spite of having witnessed a perfectly successful production of this scene [the "Sangerkrieg" episode from *Tannhäuser*], have not received the right impression of its purport. Their idea is that it belongs to the traditional operatic 'genre,' which demands that a number of vocal evolutions shall be juxtaposed or contrasted, and that these different songs are intended to amuse and interest the audience by means of their purely musical changes in rhythm and time on the principle of a concert programme, i.e. by various items of different styles. This was not at all my idea: my real intention was, if possible, to force the listener, for the first time in the history of opera, to take an interest in a poetical idea, by making him follow all its necessary developments. For it was only by virtue of this interest that he could be made to understand the catastrophe, which in this instance was not to be brought about by any outside influence, but must be the outcome simply of the natural spiritual processes at work. Hence the need of

great moderation and breadth in the conception of the music; first, in order that according to my principle it might prove helpful rather than the reverse to the understanding of the poetical lines, and secondly, in order that the increasing rhythmic character of the melody which marks the ardent growth of passion may not be interrupted too arbitrarily by unnecessary changes in modulation and rhythm. Hence, too, the need of a very sparing use of orchestral instruments for the accompaniment, and an intentional suppression of all those purely musical effects which must be utilized, and that gradually, only when the situation becomes so intense that one almost ceases to think, and can only feel the tragic nature of the crisis.

This cessation of thinking, followed by the surrender to passion referred to above, is the effect sought in the Wagnerian Dream.

Among those captivated by the vision of Wagner's Dream were men of no mean accomplishment. Franz Liszt was midwife in the birth of Wagnerianism. Bernard Shaw was the great apologete for the new religion. Thomas Mann arrayed Wagnerianism in the attire of mysticism. Humperdinck and Richard Strauss were zealous followers of Wagner. So were Nietzsche and Debussy before they defected from the company of the enchanted, hurriedly repudiating whatever they had written or said while under the spell.

The mighty blast of the Wagnerian theatre was a long sound—still audible in the art and music of today's world. The strong sensation of apartness and isolation so carefully cultivated by many areas of the theatre is partially attributable, historically, to the mystical element which Wagner attached to his brand of theatre. The size and power of modern theatrical, operatic, and motion-picture orchestration are direct consequences of Wagner's insistence on having ten of everything in his own symphony-sized Bayreuth orchestra. From the intense emotional Hollywood-mood music to the musically intense "religious" drama, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*—all bear the stamp: Wagner was here.

The supremacy of passion over human reason in dictating human affairs and human actions reaches its ultimate expression in the very personification of Wagner's Dream, *Tristan und Isolde*. This was not the last work to be composed by Wagner, nor, in actual fact, the one into which Wagner himself believed he had most exhaustively poured the wealth of his inspiration. But this tragedy of passion which is *Tristan* is perhaps the music-drama that best "comes off." The libretto, the score, the characterization, the very metrical system of the poem breathe out these two propositions which underlie Wagner's Dream: man must submit to passion; passion is to end only in death.

Tristan und Isolde opens on board the ship in which Tristan, a knight, is bringing Isolde, Princess of Ireland, to her future husband, King Mark of Cornwall. Passion, the theme, is sounded in the very opening of the

tragedy when Isolde reveals to her attendant, Brangaene, the blood-feud between herself and Tristan. The knight had slain her former betrothed in battle, and, seriously wounded, had chanced to come to her aid. Recognizing him, she was about to take her revenge with a sword, when

Lying upon his bed, he turned his eyes upward, not at the sword, nor at my arm—he fastened his eyes upon mine, and his weakness softened my heart. The sword—dropped from my fingers.

Tristan recovers, goes back to Cornwall, and then later returns to claim Isolde as bride for his king. On the homeward voyage, Tristan for some reason secludes himself. Isolde summons Tristan in order to accomplish a threefold purpose: the end to her escort's peculiar coldness, the avoidance of an unwanted match with the King of Cornwall, and her revenge for the killing of her betrothed. Ostensibly, to seal the peace between them, they are to drink together—a poisoned drink.

But the attendant introduces instead a love potion. Drinking it, the force of passion comes upon Tristan and Isolde explosively. They draw their hands across their brows, uncomprehending, crying each other's name as they tell of the feeling which possesses them:

Languishing passion, desiring, increasing, love forever yearning, glowing. Ecstasy made manifest possesses each heart. . . . O ecstasy, beset with slyness. O deceiver, overrunning with delight.

As their ship nears land and King Mark, the first act ends.

Act Two brings us to the very core of Wagner's Dream. Brangaene understands what she has done—the consequences of her substitution of the love potion: the regret of reason at its impotency to restrain passion. She blames herself, but Isolde replies:

I took the work of death into my own hands. . . . The goddess of love . . . planned our fate in her own way, how she may form and complete it. I am hers alone. Let me obey her alone.

Here is the equation of passion with death. Here is the abdication of responsibility upon surrender to passion. These are the figures which people Wagner's world of dreams, the fated wanderer, slave to passion, doomed to defeat in every encounter with it because passion's victory is the mind's defeat and frustration. The soul still thirsts for that tranquillity and rest which passion promises, but can never give. The soul of man comes from each onslaught with its adversary, more empty than before; it gives all, attains nothing. Wagner tries to prolong in the course of his dramas the inner stirrings of romantic love, which human beings may experience sporadically, but which ultimately they must control. Each sensation momentarily offers satisfaction of yearning and must be clasped as it comes along as though to hold it forever.

Tristan and Isolde meet and give violent expression to their emotions. Possessed by love, their union is not complete. This kind of love—passionate, all-consuming—demands all. Higher and higher rises the torturing chromatic ascent. More and more frenzied become the cries of the lovers. Cut off from a world ruled by reason, they are beset by insatiable loneliness—the loneliness of the fated wanderer. "O night of ecstasy, descend upon us!" This is an analogy which returns again and again, dramatically as well as musically, in the tragedy of Tristan and Isolde. Night, to cloak deeds of passion, for light is the symbol of reason, exposes to the truth of life the feeble reality of emotion unmastered by reason.

O night, set us free . . . extinguish our remembering, drown our fears. We surrender. . . I am yours. . . O night we then together die . . . our paradise in love alone. O night without end, the delights of love are supreme.

It is in the very act of consummation of their illicit love that King Mark comes, led by Tristan's betraying friend, Melot. Mark sees what has come to pass and bitterly denounces the knight whom he considers the soul of purity and loyalty and on whom he has lavished so much affection. Tristan is overcome with shame. Isolde, too, despite continued protests of devotion to her lover, feels the sting of Mark's accusations.

If *Tristan und Isolde* ended here and went no further, though certain structural difficulties in the play would have to be solved, we would still be in touch with reality, with the world we know as true, where mind reigns over emotion. Moral judgment, at this stage of the drama, has been passed on the aberrant human conduct of Tristan and Isolde. A vague kind of regret for misdeed has sprung up in the consciences of the two lovers. At last, the mind has been admitted to cast its light of objective reality on the unhappy disturbance of passion which is momentarily overthrowing the existing order in the world.

But there is still more to come. In the last act, we swerve once again from this rational point of view, compelled to stand by the principle of the Wagnerian Dream of self, which immersed in a cloud of passion, attempts to judge reality. In the last act of *Tristan*, we see the knight languishing in his faraway castle on the verge of death. The real and objective cause of his rapid demise, for those who at this point are still in a frame of mind to look for such things, is the wound received from Melot at the close of the previous scene. Tristan had stoically exposed himself to the sword thrust of the friend who had betrayed him. But the symbolic cause—and therefore, for Wagner, the real cause—is the sword thrust of passion itself, enervating the soul which was pierced by it, until death, the sole reprieve, comes to end the longing.

Returning briefly to consciousness, Tristan sings once again the fated wanderer motif with its night-day symbolism:

Where I awoke . . . I could not tell. It was—the land out of

which I once came, and where I return, an eternal realm of night, earthly night. One thing possessed me there—blank, endless oblivion.

He calls again and again for Isolde, but she arrives only to behold him slip away into death. Even as she rushes to embrace him, Tristan expires. She is too late. And Isolde, like Tristan, like all of mankind, is left in the moment of passion's attainment with a vain and empty dream.

Am I then deprived by Tristan of this our solitary, swift-passing, final earthly joy?

King Mark appears and, to her unheeding ears listening in vain for the breathing of her lost Tristan, speaks of his acceptance, born of understanding, of what has gone before; he knows now of the potion as the cause of the lovers' tragic relationship.

When uncovered was the mystery which I could not solve, I was overjoyed to find my friend was free from fault.

And here we find the moral judgment that the sin of passion is truly inevitable—the conspiracy of nature and circumstance arrayed against man. Responsibility is lifted from those in the grip of passion by the innocent victim of passion's wrongdoing, Mark himself.

Tristan is a portrait of passion and its hopelessness, but it is important for us to realize clearly that this transport of emotion in *Tristan*, as the exemplar of the Wagnerian Dream, is something altogether other than mere lust. Were this the case, there would be no tragedy. The play would end halfway through Act Two with complete sexual satisfaction. In reality, the heartbreak of the drama lies in the mind's failure to be satisfied with carnality's attainment. The victory of body in Act Two is rendered tragic by the frustration of spirit in Act Three.

Although *Tristan und Isolde* epitomizes well the Wagnerian Dream, the premises so emphatically affirmed therein have similar applications in Wagner's other music-dramas. In *Parsifal* the transcendence of passion is stated in terms of religion. In *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner's comic opera, even the mundane life of a bustling medieval town is depicted in the customary rosy glow. Walther, the hero, hardly sings a note without rapturous murmurings from the orchestra below. Eva, the heroine, is seized in an amorous spell when her lover chances to enter at the moment when she is having her shoes fitted. In the lengthy *Ring of the Nibelungen* trilogy, three connected dramas with prologue, we have in extended form the same romantic propositions exemplified in *Tristan*. Wagner aimed most especially at unity of form in the Ring Series and may have thought he attained it, but somewhere along the way, his plan went awry. Its characters are mere puppets in the hands of their creator. Its text is wandering and repetitive; its music seldom of the quality of *Tristan* or *Die Meistersinger*.

This is the dream world of Richard Wagner—a world seen through the disfiguring prism of passion. It is important to come to some kind of verdict where Wagner is concerned, because it is traditional to assume that Wagnerianism is something about which *anyone* is at liberty to have an opinion. Supposedly knowledgeable people, under the impression that they were hearing Wagner, have attacked some excerpt of Mozart or Brahms. If one can hear the Valhalla motif in *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* or in a Brahms song cycle, then he does not know Wagner.

It is no longer fashionable to be a Wagnerian, as it once was when musicologists referred in reverent tones to Wagner as "the Master." But the reasons alleged for this disfavor are, at best, specious. "Wagner is too loud," some people are wont to say. So is Beethoven loud. So is Bach loud; and he would doubtless have been louder had he lived in the epoch of the modern orchestra. "Wagner has no melody," some complain. Wagner's music is, as a matter of fact, replete with melody. One might with justice say that that is precisely the difficulty; there are too many melodies—melodies which never develop or go anywhere. Do people rant and rave against Stravinsky because *Oedipus* has no melody? "Wagner is immoral," accuse those who have not the vaguest idea what the accusation implies. And yet this last objection, I think, states the case against Wagner rather exactly.

A few years ago, a leading Catholic periodical, in a review of a then-current production of *Die Meistersinger*, gave Wagner a moral dressing-down. Unfortunately, as one read further into the critique, one discovered that the particulars of the indictment were unintelligibly peripheral factors in the dreaming of Wagner's Dream. Hans Sachs, it was affirmed, was an unscrupulous scoundrel for permitting Beckmesser to deceive himself as to the authorship of a particular song-poem figuring in the plot. The reviewer let the opera go at that.

It seems strange how we could miss the point of Wagnerianism, inasmuch as Wagner is one of the few operatic composers who described in fairly coherent prose exactly what he was trying to do in the music-drama. The basic assumptions of Wagner's Dream of passion are far more insidious and far-reaching than we are sometimes willing to admit. They are, in fact, grossly immoral—more so than if he wrote obscene dialogue or used lascivious plot; and they are purveyed with great discernment and keen skill.

What we in our culture have come to call "morality" is not merely an arbitrary construct of the sentiments and opinions of moral philosophers or theologians. The distinction between "virtue" and "vice" is not founded on some sort of Emily Post-like codification of what is to be done or what is not to be done. Morality is a standard of values rooted in our belief of what man is, what he is supposed to be doing with his life, where he is supposed to be going. Morality is, in short, based on human nature itself, that strange complex that is man, partly animal and sensual, partly intel-

lectual or rational. Though man is constructed in many "layers," composed of many powers and many integral parts, there is a clear-cut hierarchy of these parts; mind is to be in control of all, since mind alone can direct man toward an end, can organize means in view of an end, can plan and accomplish what human nature is supposed to accomplish, while sensuality is reason's servant, and a rather untrustworthy servant at that, subject to transient moods and the most absurdly subjective standards of judging reality, if left to its own devices. Consequently, when we label something as being "immoral"—a book or a play or a man's conduct of his own life—we mean only that the book or play or conduct violates nature as rational; therefore, what is "immoral" is something which is merely irrational. Man has allowed some outside influence to divert him from the serious work of life which is his main concern. The application here is to the notion of Wagner and the romantics that emotional experience is superior to the judgment of reason.

But this is rebellion. A revolution of this kind leads only to chaos in the human organism. To give full vent to emotion is to exile reason, placing passion over mind, material considerations over spiritual considerations. This is to hold by the unreal—to appraise human nature and the universe in which human nature exists according to base and false criteria. It is to say that emotion, or the art which inspires it, is truer and more real merely because, experientially, it is more satisfying.

Mind perceives ends and means. Emotion, concerned with the concrete, the momentary, the ephemeral, forgets about ends—something man dares not do. Emotion ungoverned prodigally dissipates the spiritual energy which human nature requires to realize itself through mind. This supposed antithesis between reason and emotion recurs constantly in the history of art, and is prevalent today. Both the romanticist and the neo-classicist suppose they must settle for one without the other, the former leaping to retrieve emotion, the latter, to retrieve reason. Of course, it is obvious all the while to the man-on-the-street that both emotion and reason are essential to human living. It is merely a question of which is to rule, which is to be on top.

Wagner's Dream is not immoral in a merely pornographic sense any more than is the *Faust* of Gounod or Verdi's *La Traviata*. As an art form, the music-drama itself is unnatural and irrational, because both its form and content require mind to surrender sovereignty to the emotional appetites. Free passion is unleashed to effect what it will, without regard for the means and ends of human life. This is clear from the librettos of the Wagnerian dramas, from Wagner's written essays on art, from the unruly and sporadic thematic development of the music, and from the very principle of continuous melody itself, which, following a musical pattern to an almost hysterical dramatic pitch, agitates the emotions beyond reason's power to govern.

The listener at a Wagnerian performance is expected to come out sweating. He has, presumably, lost himself in a story, words and music, in which he has accomplished the release of his lower self. He has volun-

tarily been transported into an unreal world without goals or means to goals, an unreal world ruled by unreal laws with no valid relationship to reality.

There is a marked parallel in the emotional intensity of Alfred Hitchcock's films, in which each suspenseful incident, over and above the demanded series of crises essential to the plot, merely serves to wring a little more emotion out of an already thoroughly dry emotional rag. The most appalling example of this was at the end of *Strangers on a Train*, where as a diverting background for the resolution of the plot line, the audience was treated to the spectacle of a merry-go-round revolving at full speed, shooting off children in every direction to the shrieks and screams of the fairground onlookers; the incident was not essential to the story. One comes from Hitchcock, as from Wagner, resentful that so much more was required of him as audience than was either necessary or desirable.

While the postwar era no longer sees the point of the prewar era's deification of Wagner, we have unfortunately failed to maintain a proper focus on him, the things he tried to do, and the things he thought were important. We have forgotten what to be wary of in the Wagnerian Dream. We do not grant him the importance and the understanding that he deserves as a forerunner of such cultural phenomena as glorify emotion to the detriment of reason. To the romantics of his era, Wagner was a prophet of new awakenings in music and theatre. He was a genius, it was thought, and what he had to say had never been said before. But in fifty years, perspectives change, and in the last fifteen years especially, we have lowered, rather than raised, our estimate of Richard Wagner. We see him now as rather less of a giant than we—or he—thought he was. We feel that what he had to say has already been said, and that rather quickly, and with rather too much of a flourish; that we have been made worse rather than better by the Wagnerian Dream; that its influence, still belatedly abroad in the world of the arts and letters, is not a healthy one.

The legend which for so long perdured at Bayreuth where so many thousands of worshippers gathered at the summer festivals, and from which so many apostles went forth to the four corners of the musical world to preach this doctrine of Wagnerianism, has faded like the very moment of experiencing in passion itself. If there are left any die-hard partisans of the dream of Richard Wagner, still frequenting the shrine of the forgotten prophet, they must face up to what for them will be startling reality; that in the world today, with its horrors, its persecutions, and its pains, it is hard for men to believe any longer in the ecstasy of passion; and that, strange to say, Richard Wagner and his theatre of passion are *passé*.

DRYDEN'S ALL FOR LOVE: The Sensual Dilemma

By R. E. HUGHES

An intelligent reappraisal of Restoration comedy has begun; a critical approach, which seems discontented with superficial reading and looks to milieu and intention, has done much to shed persuasive new light on the work of the Restoration comic dramatists.¹ The major theme of this criticism is that within these plays the comic writers were conducting an exploration of the intellectual forces at work in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and were discovering the clash between various traditions and beliefs. The point of this essay is to suggest that a similar reinvestigation be made of Restoration tragedy; that such a reinvestigation will discover that, whereas the comic writers were investigating their age, the tragic writers were indicting it; that the indictment was of the *impasse* which skepticism, the dominant philosophic attitude of the Restoration, had forced upon the age; and that the dramatic symbol of this indictment was dilemma. The crucial scenes of Restoration tragedy are concerned with the inability of the protagonists to choose—and this inability is the result of skepticism. This essay intends to conduct such an investigation of John Dryden's *All For Love*, with some commentary on Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserv'd*.

The identification of skepticism as the dominant attitude of the Restoration can be made from several directions: from the philosophic (as Louis Bredvold in his study of Dryden's intellectual milieu² has done, demonstrating the persistence of skeptical thought in English intellectual history); from the political (we discern in the political theory of Halifax, for instance, the dread of a recurrence of that kind of partisanship which had resulted in the Civil Wars); from the intellectual and theoretical (evidence the Hobbesian doctrine of absolutist government: a doctrine which assumes the fallibility of human choice and solves the problem by rigidly and arbitrarily denying choice); and from the psychological (we find in the Restoration a protective rejection of the kind of frustrating inquiry for final truth which characterized the first half of the century). On all levels, the philosophic, political, intellectual, and psychological—

¹ The fullest criticism which takes this new direction is Dale Underwood's study, *Etherege and the Seventeenth-Century Comedy of Manners* (Yale, 1957). Shorter but penetrating critiques have been made by F. W. Bateson ("Second Thoughts: L. C. Knights and Restoration Comedy," *Essays in Criticism*, II [1957], 56-67) and by Norman H. Holland ("Restoration Comedy Again," *op. cit.*, III, 319-322). More recently, Professor Holland has expanded his investigations in *The First Modern Comedies* (Harvard University Press, 1959).

² Louis Bredvold, *The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden*. University of Michigan Publications in Language and Literature, Vol. XII, 1931.

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the Restoration adopted skepticism as a remedy for the discomforts associated with doctrinaire or dogmatic philosophies. After all, commitment to a religious dogma had led to the Puritan-Anglican conflicts and eventually to civil war; commitment to a single political policy had led Charles I to the scaffold; history had shown how institutions, ideals, and policies collapse: better far to adopt a habit of detachment and tentativeness. In every sphere of Restoration life, skepticism became the accepted panacea.

But, of course, skepticism has its attendant evil. Complete detachment involves cutting oneself off from any directing norm; if all positions are relative, and if no final commitment can be made, there can be no guide of conduct. Without some acceptance of one idea as being superior to another, "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," and the ability to choose disappears. In the field of politics, the detachment of skepticism may be a good; in the field of human personality, it can easily become an evil, for it turns man adrift in a sea of negations.

It is this spectacle of man involved in a world of negations, where choice has become impossible and freedom of the will an absurdity, which is the real subject of Otway's major tragedies and of Dryden's greatest play. Each writer depicts a universe in which evil is ubiquitous; the inhabitants of that world, though they make an effort to assert their power to choose and delude themselves into believing that such choice is possible, are frustrated; and they necessarily collapse in the face of alternatives which negate one another. The pattern of the deluded hero confronting a situation which invites choice, only to find that no choice is possible, is recurrent in Restoration tragedy.

In Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, for example, we have a clear case of tragedy of dilemma. Belvidera has been disowned by her father for having married Jaffier. Enraged, Jaffier vows revenge; and in this frame of mind conspires with his friend Pierre to overthrow the Venetian senate, of which his father-in-law is a member. Pierre, a strange blend of misanthropy and idealism, introduces Jaffier to a band of conspirators also intent on revolution. Shortly, Jaffier recognizes that his own mixed motive of revenge and of purifying a corrupt state is overshadowed by the depravity of the conspirators' plot, and he hastens to warn the senate. To do so he must betray Pierre. In return for his testimony, he receives the senate's promise that they will not harm his friend; but the senate reneges. Jaffier kills Pierre to deliver him from the infamy of a public execution, then commits suicide; Belvidera goes mad, and dies in her insanity.

Otway has had a glimpse of the fruits of skepticism and libertinism; he has seen that a generation of moral laxity has reduced society to shambles where reason and coherence cannot exist. In the characters of Jaffier, Pierre, and Belvidera, Otway presents us with three people who falsely assume that the human reason can play a part in deciding human destiny; who assume that the world is a place in which man can choose between right and wrong. But there is no possibility of choice: Jaffier's

own motives are paradoxical; he is constantly faced with intellectual and moral dilemmas (acceptance of a corrupt state versus purification of the state through agents of evil; protection of the corrupt state by betrayal of a friend versus abandonment of the state to slaughter by protecting a friend). Intellect and reason have been defeated by unreason and absurdity.

In *The Orphan*, the several characters attempt to shield themselves from polluted reality by erecting a barrier between it and themselves: the setting of the play, Acasto's garden and estate, is an artificial Eden, an attempt to re-create the pre-lapsarian state of innocence. In their first interview in the play, Polydore compares himself to Adam, Monimia to Eve (Act I, ii, 305-314). In the love scene of the second act, Castalio and Monimia address one another as creatures of the field (Act II, ii, 325-337). When Castalio suspects that he has been betrayed by his brother, the temptation in the Garden of Eden leaps to his mind (Act III, ii, 587-594). Briefly, the idyllic garden is first established in the play as a haven; Acasto's garden develops into the Garden of Eden; Genesis is re-enacted, and the fall from grace and virtue is accomplished; the futility of the flight from evil is dramatized. As in *Venice Preserv'd*, Otway's sense of the evil that surrounds men and the impossibility of escaping it provides the powerful statement of the play. Acasto's attempt to shield his sons from the evil outside the garden is abortive, and the forces of the illogical dilemma dominate. Acasto imagines he can choose between innocence and evil; but he cannot. Monimia imagines she can choose between innocence and deceit; but she cannot. Polydore and Castalio imagine they can choose between manhood and degradation; but they cannot. The factor of choice has been removed from their world.

Clearly, a transfer has been made: skepticism as a philosophic mode has been applied to the world outside the mind. Subjectively, skepticism involves a suspension of decision; when so transferred to the objective world, skepticism becomes a characteristic of that world, and involves the impossibility of choice. The indictment being made in Otway's tragedies is of the atrophying effects of skepticism, imagined not as individual indecision but as universal indecision. The indictment, strong as it is in Otway's tragedies, is more powerfully stated and its ramifications are more developed in John Dryden's *All For Love*.

It hardly needs to be argued that Dryden's play is not Shakespeare's. The provocation, Dryden admitted, was Shakespeare's; and source-hunting through *All For Love* for echoes of *Antony and Cleopatra* might well be enlightening. But it may help to recall one difference between the two plays (a small one which ultimately makes *all* the difference): the setting of Dryden's play is after Actium. Dryden's Antony has already passed through his trials as triumvir, as statesman, and as warrior. Whereas Shakespeare's Antony had yet to endure these three several conflicts, Dryden's Antony has already lost these three. Thus, there remains only one thing for Dryden's Antony to prove: his manhood. This is the only thing he has left; this he desperately tries to maintain and demon-

strate; this is his *agon*. *All For Love* is an account of Anthony's attempts to prove his manhood, and an exposure of the absurdity of these attempts. There are several apparent choices and decisions in the tragedy: passion versus reason, love versus honor, Roman stoicism versus Egyptian decadence. But these are all attendant on the major theme of Anthony's proof of his maleness. There are also several decisions made in the play: Ventidius' temporary influence on Antony and the decision to lead the Parthians against Caesar; Octavia's temporary recapture of Antony and the decision to reject Cleopatra. But each of these decisions collapses before the major theme of the impossibility of choice, and each is even temporarily successful only because Antony imagines he is proving himself by making such a decision. Ventidius appeals to Antony's manliness as troop commander; Octavia to his manliness as sire of his children. But the appeal of these proofs is momentary, and Antony leaves them to pursue other means. In his "choice" of the other means, Antony is trapped by dilemma. Very briefly, *All For Love* gives us this dilemma of a man left with but one way to prove that he is yet a man; and that one way is at the same time the surest destruction of his manhood: this is Dryden's Cleopatra, redemptress and destroyer.

The tragedy begins with the spectacle of Antony having barricaded himself from the world, resolved to discover some way to "redeem what Actium lost." In the first act, Ventidius discerns what Antony's discovery has been: he has decided to redeem and to restate his manhood. Ventidius muses:

He censures eagerly his own misdeeds,
Judging himself with malice to himself,
And not forgiving what as man he did,
Because his other parts are more than man.
He must not thus be lost.

The blame for Antony's unmanning, Ventidius traces to Cleopatra:

Oh, she has deck'd his ruin with her love,
Led him in golden bands to gaudy slaughter,
And made perdition pleasing; she has left him
The blank of what he was;
I tell thee, eunuch, she has quite unmann'd him.

Ventidius speaks figuratively: the eunuchdom of Antony he presents as a metaphor, expressing Antony's diminished stature in war and statesmanship. But Antony does not understand the problem in merely figurative terms. He is literally concerned with his virility, his potency; and it is this which he is determined to salvage from the wreck of all his fortunes. Everything else has collapsed; this he must save. And in this first act, Antony introduces the themes which he runs upon through the entire tragedy: the fear of age, the longing for youth, the jealousy of those who yet possess their youth; and the perception of Cleopatra as the one person who can

testify to and nourish his wishful concentration on his virility. Reviewing his situation, his mind fixes on the topics of youth, age, and privation:

Now, Antony, wouldst thou be born for this?
Glutton of fortune, thy devouring youth
Has starv'd thy wanting age.

While Antony is in this frame of mind, Ventidius has momentary success in calling on him to reassert himself as warrior, for he argues that warfare is one way of proving that he is a man. This temporary resolution on Antony's part carries over into the second act, for Antony interprets the intended battle as a way of demonstrating his superiority over Caesar; not as one soldier over another, but as a man over a boy. He refers to Caesar as "the coldest youth," and then flares up when he thinks of Caesar's youth as an affront to himself:

Good heav'ns, is this—is this the man who braves me?
Who bids my age make way, drives me before him,
To the world's ridge, and sweeps me off like rubbish?

When he reneges on his promise to Ventidius at the end of this act, and decides rather to choose Cleopatra as his best proof, he returns again to the effrontery of Caesar's youth:

Give, you gods,
Give to your boy, your Caesar,
This rattle of a globe to play withal,
This gewgaw world, and put him cheaply off:
I'll not be pleased with less than Cleopatra.

Quite clearly, his own age and the attendant impotence have become a fixation. All events, all decisions, Antony reduces to these terms. Cleopatra's relevance to this fixation is made evident in a most significant speech of Antony's in the first scene of the third act. To Cleopatra, Antony exclaims:

Receive me, Goddess!
Let Caesar spread his subtile nets, like Vulcan;
In thy embraces I would be beheld
By heav'n and earth at once,
And make their envy what they meant their sport.
Let those who took us blush; I would love on
With awful state, regardless of their frowns,
As their superior God.
There's no satiety of love in thee;
Enjoy'd, thou still art new; perpetual spring
Is in thy arms; the ripen'd fruit but falls,
And blossoms rise to fill its empty place,
And I grow rich by giving.

The archetypal value of these details (Cleopatra as the spring, the renewer; the carnal symbolism of fruition, completion, regeneration) is obvious. It is through sensualism that Antony hopes to give evidence of his

manhood. The irony, the dilemma, is that in so proving himself, Antony depletes himself. And it is Ventidius who recognizes this, even as he had had a figurative apprehension of it in the first act. When Dolabella appears in this third act, he is immediately put on the defensive by Antony's harping on his youth; and Ventidius bluntly contrasts Dolabella's own natural, youthful vitality with Antony's constrained and self-defeating vitality. "Speak boldly," he commands Dolabella who has begun to compare Antony's passion with his own, and then bluntly lashes out at Antony's show of virility:

Speak boldly.

Yours, he would say, in your declining age,
When no more heat was left but what you forc'd,
When all the sap was needful for the trunk
When it went down, then you constrain'd the course,
And robb'd from nature, to supply desire.

The cruel dilemma in which Antony is trapped is precisely this: that Cleopatra is paradoxically the last means he has to show his virility, and, at the same time, the most certain way of draining his vitality from him. Morally and even physically, Antony is already dead before the end of the tragedy, as Ventidius has seen: for the sap left to him has been falsely diverted and has robbed him of his nature. The literal death of Antony is the result of attrition; he has so exhausted himself in his vain proof of himself as man, that he dies of enfeeblement. On hearing the report of Cleopatra's death, Antony simply dissolves. Ventidius, hearing the report, appeals to Antony:

Come, rouse yourself, and let's die warm together.

Ant. I will not fight: there's no more work for war.

The bus'ness of my angry hours is done.

Vent. Caesar is at your gates.

Ant. Why, let him enter;

He's welcome now.

Vent. What lethargy has crept into your soul?

This is not a tragedy of action, wrong choice, or misguided reason; it is a tragedy of a passion that is but dimly understood. Perhaps more exactly, it is psychological drama in a very full sense: the account of a powerful compulsion in Antony which is incapable of resolution, for it is self-defeating and self-negating. It is the sensual dilemma of virility wasting itself to prove itself. It is a tragedy of the inability of man to choose, because of the dark forces of negation which lie beyond his reason.

The startling relevance to our own age of Dryden's awareness of elements beyond reason which dispute man's comprehension of himself as a rational being; the subtlety of Dryden's perception of the psychology involved in Antony's tragedy; the dissatisfaction with the predominant skepticism of the age—these are all elements which need to be considered in a much-needed re-evaluation of Restoration tragedy. Current research

and critical analysis have shown Restoration comedy to be indebted to the later seventeenth-century habit of detached curiosity and scientific skepticism, and to be comically aware of the clash of opinions and beliefs. Restoration tragedy is the other side of the coin, revealing the tragic implication of such skepticism.

THE MYSTERY OF MARY: An Adaptation of the Lincoln Cycle of Mystery Plays

By SISTER M. MADELEVA, C.S.C., E. MARTIN BROWNE, H. BERTOLD DIETZ

If you have been fortunate in your study of history, you may have fallen in love with the Middle Ages. You may have been caught in the charm of medieval drama, the disarming naivete with which it takes possession of Scriptures, the Testaments both Old and New, the anachronistic license with which it adapts Scripture narrative, saints' legends, traditions, the vices, the virtues to presentation on its stage.

This indigenous and spontaneous art resulted in a body of literature classified under medieval religious drama as the Mystery, Miracle, and Morality Plays. We, at Saint Mary's College, are under their spell, their charm. Annually, for a quarter of a century, we have presented a medieval nativity play as a climactic event of our Christmas program.

With the facilities of O'Laughlin Auditorium and Moreau Hall, we went in quest of artists who could direct our enthusiasms and give validity to our well-intentioned medieval productions. Mr. E. Martin Browne and his wife, Henzie Raeburn, have come to our faculty as guest-artists and teachers in answer to this quest. Their production and direction of the York Cycle in York for the Festival of Britain may stand as one example of the integrity of their art, their intelligent simplicity of interpretation, the inspiration of settings, the enveloping reverence of performance. All of these verify their place as the best contemporary exponents of medieval religious drama.

We, here in the middlewest of America, and almost on the threshold of a third millennium, may not realize that this is the most momentous story in human history and the one with which the ultimate happiness of everyone of us is most intimately concerned. We must not look on it merely as a representation of events that took place two thousand years ago. It is for everyone of us the story of the hope of our immortality through the avenues of the maid of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus. The more deeply we share it, the more profoundly it becomes for us the mystery of Mary.

The Mystery of Mary is an adaptation of a large part of the Lincoln Cycle of Mystery Plays. This Cycle was mistakenly called *Ludus Coventriae* until recent researches led scholars to agree that it originated in Lincoln,

Sister M. Madeleva, C.S.C., president of Saint Mary's College at Notre Dame, Indiana, E. Martin Browne, noted for his medieval production for the Festival of Britain and guest-artist director, and H. Bertold Dietz, conductor of the Polyphonic Choir at Saint Mary's have collaborated in this account of their recent presentation of "The Mystery of Mary," from the Lincoln Cycle of Mystery Plays.

England, about the year 1425. The whole Cycle is a compilation of many short plays, covering the entire span of human history as known to medieval man: the Creation and Fall, some scenes from the Old Testament, the life of Mary, the life of Christ, and finishing with the General Judgment at the world's end.

Plays on these subjects were first given by the clergy in the larger churches as part of the services at great Festivals, especially at Christmas and Easter. By the fourteenth century, they had grown so popular and so elaborate that they had to be given outside the church, in the open air, and were acted by the laity. In many cities, they were played on wagons, each wagon carrying a separate scene, moving in procession about the streets. The Lincoln Cycle, however, is devised for a fixed "multiple" stage which, like many paintings of the period, shows several scenes at once.

The material used by the anonymous writer is mainly biblical. His sources for the early life of Mary are the early Christian books, *Protevangelion* and *The Gospel of Mary*. Throughout the Cycle, a strong accent is placed on liturgical worship; all the music prescribed in the text comes from the liturgy as performed in the author's day, and he dramatizes the origin of the canticles, *Magnificat*, *Benedictus* and *Nunc Dimittis*.

This liturgical accent, however, is incidental to a lively drama, which was doubtless the most elaborate entertainment of the year, and had a popular appeal which has hardly been matched by the theatre of later periods. In true medieval fashion, the author brings his story home to his audience by depicting it as happening in the conditions of his own time. The Trials of Joseph and Mary by ordeal, for instance, represents a common practice in medieval law. The characters are fully human: Joseph is given a ready wit, as in their different ways are the Summoner, the two gossips and the Seneschal; Joachim, Anne, and the Shepherds are touching in their simple emotion; and the Passion and Resurrection sequence, which in this adaptation is introduced through the prophetic visions of Simeon, reaches the heights of tragedy and of joy.

The Lincoln Cycle is the latest in date of the English Mystery Plays, and is notable for its use of characters representing abstract concepts. These form the dramatis personae of the Morality Play, a type of drama which was then coming into vogue. The Mystery of Mary is introduced by Contemplation; later, as Peace, she takes part in a debate between the Virtues which leads up to the Incarnation. The child Mary has five companions who represent aspects of the godly life. The two accusers at the Trials impersonate the vices of the tongue. Death appears to vanquish the overweening Herod. Thus, the Cycle stands midway between the liturgical origins of Christian drama and the Morality Play. One of the finest and most elaborate of these plays, *The Castle of Perseverance*, dates from about the same time and comes from the same part of the country as this Cycle, while the greatest of them, *Everyman*, is of slightly later date.

The decor of this production is adapted from the series of frescoes by Giotto in the Arena Chapel at Padua, Italy, where, between 1303 and 1306,

the painter depicted the entire story told in the Cycle, scene for scene. Giotto's treatment is simple and monumental yet full of human warmth and emotion; and it often gives the impression of having been inspired by a dramatic performance. The world of medieval Christianity was not divided by national barriers; and it is not surprising that the frescoes come very close in spirit to the English Cycle. Accordingly, it seemed appropriate to use the Italian master as designer-in-chief.

The music heard in this play is representative of two spheres, the heavens and the earth. The heavenly choir, for example, announces the appearance of an angel, brings the message of peace to the shepherds, or sings an *Ave Regina* to our Lady. Instrumental music, played on the organ, brass, or stringed instruments, represents the temporal world. It accompanies or prepares the action of shepherds, priests, the Holy Family, or it opens a scene at King Herod's court. A sacred choir will sing a *Te Deum*, chant the *Nunc Dimittis*, or give voice to Mary's *Magnificat*. The two spheres meet in one of the most delightful and humorous moments of the play, when the shepherds boorishly try to recall and imitate the angelic music of the *Gloria* they have just heard. Being rather unsuccessful, they return to their own kind of song, giving glory to God in their crude version of a carol.

Listeners will notice a recurrent theme which precedes or accompanies every appearance of an angel. This music is part of a short motet by the fifteenth-century English composer, Leonel Power. The words of this noble motet, "Blessed progeny whence Christ was born: how glorious is the Virgin who gave birth to the King of Heaven," are to be heard only once, just after Gabriel announces the birth of our Lord.

In selecting the music for the play, we relied entirely on documents of the Medieval and Early Renaissance periods. Thus, there appear, next to melodies drawn from the plainsong repertory, musical compositions that range from a ninth-century organum to a trumpet fanfare by the great Josquin Despres, who died in 1521. With all our incidental numbers, we aimed to present "characteristic" music rather than "mood" music. The selections fit the pace and content of the action, and in addition, strive to express joy, meditation, and praise, or round off a scene as needed. Music of these periods has expressive powers of remarkable variety. We find works of deeply contemplative spirit, others with strong, vivid, and energetic qualities. Some reveal an extraordinary affinity to our twentieth-century modern music. Thus, on the whole, this music lends itself well to use in a dramatic production. So, from the opening organ paraphrase of a *Kyrie* (fourteenth century) to the last number "Maria zart" by Arnold Schlick (ca. 1500) the incidental music supports, with stylistic accuracy, the character and message of this Mystery Play.

The production of a Medieval Cycle of Mystery Plays at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, was planned with Mr. and Mrs. E. Martin Browne during their visit to the college two years ago. Mr. Browne had



Via Dolorosa

**The "multiple stage" with
"Mansions" after Giotto
by Donald Rathgeb**



**Presentation
of Mary
in the temple**



**Espousals of
Joseph and Mary**



completed his adaptation, *The Mystery of Mary*, from the unique script of the Lincoln Cycle by January, 1959. Preliminary casting of the fifty-four parts was made in April, 1959 and completed February 1, 1960 when rehearsals began.

The fifty-nine costumes worn in the production were designed and made by Suzanne Stemnock, a Saint Mary's senior, and her freshman assistant, Susan Nelis. This enterprising team borrowed books from the National Gallery for minute details, such as the particular red for Mary's dress, and boots for the kings. They pored over the series of reproductions from the Giotto frescoes which appeared in *Life* magazine for December, 1948. They achieved results approaching the professional in fidelity and excellence.

The bulk of the costumes were percale with over-dresses of corduroy for the best light effects. Joachim wore translucent, jewel-like green and pink, contrasting with the orange gown of his wife, Anne. Only the angels were clad in silk. Black was significantly used for Herod, and his servant, Death.

Mary, as a child, as a girl in the temple, and as a bride, wore off-white rich fabrics, very amply designed. As the wife of Joseph, she appeared in the red gown of a matron with a deep blue mantle and chiffon veil. Jesus alone was clothed in pure white.

The six complete performances of this profoundly moving medieval play from March 23 through March 27 brought to college drama and theatre, subjects and magnitudes seldom attempted or realized. The simplicity and perfection of the production impressed distinguished guests from many colleges and metropolitan areas as approximating the professional. To quote John Reich of the Goodman Memorial Theatre, "The serenity and dedication of spirit . . . did a great deal for us." By happy coincidence, Nevill Coghill, who shares with the Brownes the distinction of eminence in medieval drama, was a guest for the last two performances. Of them he writes: "As for the performance of the Lincoln Cycle, it was past expression, touching and vivid; it is a splendid thing to see the stirring vision of so many centuries ago brought freshly true to our own hungry century. How the founders of your college would have felt rewarded!"

This experience, this reward came to every member of every audience during the week. Few of the thousands who shared the moving hours of the re-presentation of the life of our Lady have been more deeply moved by any dramatic production. A number of exacting and competent critics in the audience did not hesitate to compare it more than favorably with Oberammergau. Joseph, however surprising at first, almost immediately established himself as "everybody's Saint Joseph," quaint, spontaneous, beloved. Mary, in the words of Nevill Coghill, achieved the performance of a great star and could have been matched, in his judgment, by only one great actress of his acquaintance.

Whatever the play achieved for its spectators, its effect upon the cast, down to the least of the stage crew, remains an inspiration—penetrating, unforgettable. Night after night, at the end of each performance, the students from the University of Notre Dame, who collaborated so splendidly in the male roles, said that they had never shared so profound an experience. For them, as for the Saint Mary's students, the past two months of rehearsal and performance became a life taken out of time, and total in itself. They know now, experimentally, something of the mystery of Mary, something of the power and the art of medieval drama.

The Lincoln Cycle is often called the Hegge Cycle because the manuscript was owned by Robert Hegge until 1629. He must have saved it from destruction, for he says: "Old manuscripts were straight bequeathed to the moths; and pigeons and jackdaws became the only students in church libraries." Under the inspiring direction of E. Martin Browne and Henzie Raeburn, the students at Saint Mary's College and the University of Notre Dame have had the opportunity of saving it from oblivion in our century and the joy of restoring it after five hundred years to glowing and beautiful life.

BERNARD SHAW'S FARCICAL VISION: Comic Perspective in the Traditional Mode

By ALAN A. STAMBUSKY

And the great man went up to do what he had been bidden to do, making once more the Theatre a fit place for man and God to go to, to laugh, and to think out life as life was lived.¹

There is a great amount of truth in this statement of Sean O'Casey, George Bernard Shaw's countryman and successor, made in tribute to the "Sage of Ayot-St. Lawrence" on the centenary of his birth.

For Shaw, writing in the sleek but down-to-dust theatre of the twentieth century, was carrying on a tradition of comic theatricality in the universal sense of the idea of a theatre. The tradition had its inception in the fifth century B.C. theatre of Aristophanes and later found fulfillment in the seventeenth-century genius of Molière. It was a tradition which recognized the theatre as essentially a stage where men could go and, "holding the mirror up to nature," laugh as well as cry, and see reflected therein some aspect of "life as life was lived" not only in its serious moments, but in its many comic glimpses as well.

Comedy's whole character, indeed, says Louis Kronenberger in *The Thread of Laughter*, is rather social than individual:

The social basis rests in the very subject matter of comedy—in all that has to do with one's life as part of a group; with one's wish to charm or persuade or deceive or dazzle others. Thus no exhibitionist can exist in solitude, no hypocrite or poseur can work without an audience.²

That is why Shaw, and before him, Aristophanes and Molière, could boast that they were capturing the universal aspects of mankind in their comedies; that is why they could ridicule through satire the foibles of human nature to which man succumbs. The very nature of the comic genre as social—one which deals with man's life as part of a group—of necessity, preconceives the existence of universal qualities common to all men. And being universal, those qualities seek natural expression in comedy before an audience bound together by the common purpose of going to the theatre to laugh, to see themselves as fellow-fools and sinners. The net result is, as Kronenberger points out, not only criticism but understanding:

Comedy is always jarring us with evidence that we are

¹ Sean O'Casey, "G. B. Shaw: The Lord of a Century," *The New York Times*, June, 1956.

² New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952, p. 6.

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no better than other people, and always comforting us with the knowledge that most other people are no better than we are.³

It is hard, therefore, either to understand or to agree with Francis Fergusson when he says in *The Idea of a Theatre*:

Comic genres . . . accept some sort of limited perspective, shared with the audience, as the basis of the fun; they show human life as comic just because they show it as consistent according to some narrowly defined, and hence unreal, basis.⁴

Certainly, comic genres, in the relationship of their universal aspects to the audiences which view them, are anything but limited in perspective. Rather are they limitless in their perspective since they can comically portray human life as sometimes consistent, but often inconsistent, according to undefined, universal, and hence, real bases.

This view of comedy possessing a fundamental universality which boosts it beyond the particular notion of limited perspective, is substantiated by Allardyce Nicoll in *The Theory of Drama*:

The fundamental assumption of comedy is that it does not deal with isolated individualities. . . . There are, then, in high comedy two main suggestions: first, that the characters are not the characters peculiar to one age or to one place; and second, that the comedy as a whole is but a part of, or a mere symbol of, the larger world of society beyond it. From this springs the feeling of generality, the feeling that is presented in high tragedy as well, that these facts and situations and persons are not isolated and separate, but are simply abstracts of something greater and of weightier significance than themselves.⁵

Bernard Shaw, like Aristophanes and Molière, was well aware of the universal aspects peculiar to comedy. Succeeding as he did to the tradition of comic theatricality advanced by Aristophanes and Molière, Shaw has been in no sense an innovator as such in the art of the theatre. Apart from his play, *Back to Methuselah*, which he termed a "metabiological pentateuch," he has made no effort to dally with the conventions of the stage. Thomas H. Dickinson highlights this important view of Shaw's place in comic theatre when, in *An Outline of Contemporary Drama*, he writes:

He is so interested in reaching the minds of men that he has no time to reconstruct their art. . . .

Shaw connects himself most closely with the classical

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1953, p. 191.

⁵ New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1931, pp. 178-180.

traditions of the long history of the stage. He himself speaks of his work as "a series of comedies of manners in the classic fashion."⁶

Shaw's concern with the social conditions of his day, and his brilliant satires on contemporary prejudices attest to the fact that he was deeply concerned with mankind. In his treatment of plays like *Candida*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Man and Superman*, and *Heartbreak House*, Shaw reveals deep springs of emotion, springs which result from his recognition of the universal application of the comic to all of mankind.

The depths that there are in these plays exist far behind the characters and the events in a regard for humanity as a whole rather than for individual men. . . .⁷

Even though Shaw did continue the traditional comic theatricality of Aristophanes and Molière, he nevertheless formulated most of his comedies, in one way or another, along lines of the play of ideas: whenever he was writing something, he was apt to be fighting something as well.⁸ Both in theory and in practice he favored the thesis play, or play of ideas. To him the theatre was a means and not an end. For he himself remarks:

I am convinced that fine art is the subtlest, most seductive, the most effective means of propagandism in the world, excepting only the example of personal conduct; and I waive even this exception in favor of the art of the stage, because it works by exhibiting examples of personal conduct made intelligible and moving to crowds of unobservant, unreflecting people to whom real life means nothing.⁹

Be that as it may, although Shaw obviously is concerned with correcting the morals of his time through comedy, it must be remembered—and this is an important consideration—he happens at the same time to be an extremely fine dramatist. And the artist in him more often than not overshadows the moralist. The thinker and preacher, while always endeavoring to come to the fore, is somehow subordinated to the dramatist.¹⁰ For that reason, his best comedies abound with the liveliness of classic comedy. We may therefore be inclined to agree wholeheartedly with Kronenberger when he says:

He [Shaw] gave the early twentieth-century theatre a shaking-up the like of which it has never known since, and in enjoying and even in assessing him as a writer, it hardly matters how much we agree with him now, any more than how much our parents agreed with him then. He may have written

⁶ New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927, p. 195.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁸ Kronenberger, p. 228.

⁹ Quoted in Barrett H. Clark, *A Study of the Modern Drama* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1925), p. 251.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

the plays for the sake of the ideas; we may read them, at times, in spite of the ideas. . . . He was simply the most stimulating man of his age, and what he carried was perhaps not a lantern but simply a whip.¹¹

When the comedies of Bernard Shaw are considered in the clear light of their relationship to the comedies of Aristophanes and Molière, certain obvious similarities between structural elements in the plays of all three writers stand out. It seems gratuitous for Fergusson to minimize Shaw by saying:

Shaw's peculiar comic sense, brilliant, theatrical, and unmistakable as it is, never found a consistent comic convention, comparable to Molière's for instance, in which it could be completely realized.¹²

The point is not well made by Fergusson. Although he admits Shaw "obviously assumes the audience, he plays to the gallery, from the very beginning,"¹³ Fergusson still apparently misinterprets the notion of "comic convention" in the narrow sense of "limited perspective" discussed earlier.

Granted Shaw did not, in the early part of his career, as Fergusson holds, "distinguish his aims from the realism of Ibsen";¹⁴ granted Shaw did not later, as Fergusson notes, propound "a simple thesis as Brieux, with perfect logic and consistency";¹⁵ granted his plays written prior to World War I were, according to Fergusson, "sentimental parlor comedies of the boulevard type"¹⁶ which he had scorned in other writers of the period; Shaw, nonetheless, in later comedies achieved a like amount of popular success which had been accorded his kindred comic lights, Aristophanes and Molière. Throwing off the shackles of his serious plays, Shaw launched forward in infectious high spirits to become the most popular playwright of his time. As Walter Kerr puts it in *How Not To Write A Play*:

His [Shaw's] ebullient instincts outran his advice, and—probably without wanting to, possibly without knowing it—he somersaulted into the area of pure comedy.¹⁷

Was not, then, the process of artistic development conceivably the same for Shaw, Aristophanes, and Molière? Molière is known to have failed in 1661 with his serious play *Don Garcia*. It is difficult to conclude that it could definitely not be so, as Fergusson implies; Shaw might well have found a similar comic convention.

The crux of the problem lies in the manner in which the comic works of Shaw relate structurally to the comic works of Aristophanes and Molière. Both wrote a form of comedy known as Comedy Proper, which concerns the story of a man whose folly (vice or stupidity) leads him to

¹¹ Kronenberger, pp. 228-229.

¹² Fergusson, p. 191.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 192

¹⁷ New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955, p. 34.

seek some anti-social end, or an end beyond his just deserts. But he is tricked in his obsession by some person, persons, condition, or circumstance outside himself; through the blindness of his folly or "comic flaw" he brings comic adversity on his own head. The comic character, furthermore, is active, exaggerated, usually one-sided. Precisely because he is one-sided, active, and exaggerated, the audience maintains a detached attitude toward the comic character. Hence, the comedy is basically intellectual, since there is no apparent sympathetic or emotional involvement with the character on the part of the audience.¹⁸

There are several subdivisions which come under the general heading of Comedy Proper. The subdivision most pertinent here is known as "high comedy," so-called because it ostensibly deals with people in high circumstances, sophisticated individuals of some social standing. Narrowing the genre even further, it encompasses a type of comedy known as "comedy of manners," characterized by certain low comedy elements set in the surroundings of high society.¹⁹ A further form of Comedy Proper is *farce* which arouses audience laughter by broad horseplay, bodily assault, and external comedy. At times, farce contains elements of high comedy.

Now, considering that Aristophanes and Molière wrote comedies properly classified as Comedy Proper, by a simple comparison of some of the structural characteristics of the Aristophanic works with those of Molière and Shaw, it may be seen that Shaw likewise was writing in the mode of Comedy Proper and, therefore, was following in the same classical tradition.

Satire is a prominent distinguishing element in the comedies of Aristophanes. They are riddled with the ridicule of people as persons and as social types. Similarly, Molière satirized different sections of high society and certain prejudices of the period. Shaw, too, used the device of satire, but leveled it at certain romantic "ideas" rather than personages. Especially is this true in *Candida*, where Shaw aims much romantic satire at Marchbanks, the poet.

Elements of absurdity are another feature prominent in the plays of the three authors. Aristophanes puts Socrates in a basket; Molière dresses Monsieur Jourdain in Turkish attire; Shaw makes a millionaire of a duster!

Physical comedy—farce, slapstick—is perhaps the chief distinguishing note in Aristophanic comedies. Aristophanes uses much physical, visual comedy: beatings, for example. In Molière, too, we find beatings, kneeling scenes, confidantes running in and out of scenes, etc. Shaw contributes some of the same in *Pygmalion* and *Candida*, but to a lesser, restrained degree. He displays it prominently, however, in *Misalliance* where a boy is

¹⁸ Nicoll, pp. 213-228

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

in a tantrum on the floor; in *Androcles and the Lion* where an emperor is chased by a lion; and in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, where a character is carried bodily from the stage to be given a bath (the character's name, incidentally, is Drinkwater).

The comic hero is paramount in the plays of the three writers. And usually, he is rewarded for the pursuit of an end unsuited to his merits with a punishment that is comic either in idea or in a physical manifestation of it. In Shaw, we are more likely to find the punishment in "idea" form—Eliza, walking out on Higgins to teach his trade, figuratively brings his goddess crashing down on him; Aristophanes and Molière probably would have done it literally.

Elements of fantasy are also present in the plays of the three. In Aristophanes, fantasy is never whimsical and generally is used for some hard-headed comic point. Molière uses it less; Shaw does not use it much at all—except in *Androcles and the Lion* and his "Don Juan in Hell" scene from *Man and Superman*.

While there is much vulgarity in Aristophanes, there is less in Molière, and practically none in Shaw. Doolittle in *Pygmalion* and Drinkwater in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* evidence some. G. K. Chesterton attributes Shaw's lack of vulgarity to his Puritanism.

As far as romantic love stories are concerned among these comic playwrights, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* makes rare sport of the love angle; Molière's lovers are insipid types, bloodless, and idiotic; Shaw treats of love, not in the style of his day, but as a "take-off" on romance—he explodes anything smacking of sentimentality.

Shaw's fame in the annals of theatre lies, as Fergusson says, in his native theatricality. But it is not theatricality in that sense of "limited perspective" delineated by Fergusson. The "Shavian inspiration" is not confined to Shaw's self-conscious "sparring upon the bare platform." He is not alone in his art; he has counterparts in Molière and Aristophanes. His dramatic roots extend to the classical tradition of comic theatricality.

Some have made the claim that Shaw is another Molière—"la nouvelle Molière." Such a claim is far from fetched. In one sense, it may be an excessive claim; in another, it may be a duly plausible one; and yet it may be stretched even further: Shaw might be greater than Molière.

Whatever the decision of time, George Bernard Shaw was a great social satirist of recent years who possessed at least a spark of the comic spirit which inflamed Aristophanes and Molière. For Shaw's plays deal freshly, forcibly, and honestly with life. Certainly, Shaw performed for his age very much the same service that Aristophanes and Molière did for theirs.

DRAMA BOOKSHELF

MOLIÈRE: THE COMIC MASK. By D. B. Wyndham Lewis. New York: Coward-McCann, 1959; pp. 207. \$4.00.

Molière: The Comic Mask isn't a book to go to for the facts for an introductory lecture on the great comedian—unless one has a long time for preparation. It isn't a lecture kind of book from any point of view, though the facts are there for the finder. But it is an interesting book, a delightful study, and reading it is a rewarding experience. It's chatty—but authentic; clever—but quiet. It makes one mourn the absence from today's theatre of any comparable playwright, and makes one wonder who will write half so entertainingly, half so competently for twentieth-century comedy.

The organization, suggested by the breakdown into "Books," is not so indicated by a table of contents, but could be marked for the busy teacher:

- Book I: Beginnings—Birth to first successes in the Provinces.
- Book II: Paris—Successes; marriage.
- Book III: Beginnings of trouble at home, with rivals and with the Faculty of Medicine.
- Book IV: *The Misanthrope*—finally, *Tartuffe*, and trouble with the church.
- Book V: The greatest rival—Jean Baptiste Lully; loss of the royal favour; *L'Avare*—a clinical study.
- Book VI: *Les Femmes Savantes*, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *Le Malade Imaginaire*—the last mockery of a dying man; death.
- Book VII: Evaluation.

If the above outline suggests a hit-or-miss presentation of life and work, it gives a false impression, for the jacket blurb does not exaggerate when it claims that

Mr. Lewis' treatment is unique among English language books on the subject. His perspective study blends the ironic comedy of Molière's own life with an appreciation of the scintillating works which he poured out under such high pressure. Here is the full flavour of life in a seventeenth-century acting company, from authoritative accounts of the lavish productions to fascinating chronicles of the rivalries, intrigues, and love affairs of the players, presented against the most magnificent backdrop of all—the fabulous court of *Le Roi Soleil*.

Every chapter, indeed every page, illustrates the British essay style, a style not found this side of the Atlantic, a style untouched by the rugged

simplification demand of radio and television. The book might well be used to point up differences between the direct approach, the economical approach of say-what-you-mean and let-it-go-at-that writers and the biographer who takes his time to *savour* the facts, the figures, and the implications. This writer, in talking about *Les Precieuses Ridicules* (first comedy of satiric observation) says:

Highbrows are natural meat for the satirist; female highbrows above all. There were no brows in contemporary Europe loftier than those of Catherine, Marquise de Rambouillet, and her clique of poets, philologists, serious fine gentlemen, and earlier ladies of quality, and few targets for satire were more indicated than the smart salons which aped them, saving always the provincials who aped the Parisians.

Two controversial questions find satisfactory answers from this thorough student of Molière: his relation to the Church and his appreciation by his Grand Monarque. Quoting Grimarest, Lewis says:

He was assisted by two of the nuns. . . . In the last moments of his life they rendered him all the spiritual succour one might expect of their charity, and he displayed all the feelings of a good Christian and all the resignation due to the will of God.

And he was buried in consecrated ground.

"Who, do you think, has been the greatest writer of my reign?" the king asked Louis of Boileau. "Molière, Sir," Louis replied. Then the king said pensively, "I had not thought so myself, but, of course, you know more about these things than I do."

Sister Mary Avila, I.H.M.
Marygrove College, Detroit

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GREEK THEATRE. By Peter D. Arnott. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959; pp. 240. \$5.00

This book, which fulfills admirably its well-chosen title, is assuringly accredited in a laudatory introduction by the eminent Cambridge scholar, H.F.D. Kitto, who is professor of Greek at Bristol and who has written some of the most readable and informative current books on Greek drama.

Peter Arnott was born in 1931, was educated at Oxford, has translated Greek plays, has acted in them, and has produced a great many of them with marionettes in a conventional Greek background. His book does not mention the marionettes, but his observations throughout indicate the practical foundation of the experience he has gained as a producer. Mr. Arnott not only has the rare combination of a background of sound scholarship in Greek along with production experience, but he also has a

wide knowledge of productions of modern re-tellings of plays based on Greek themes as they have been given in many different countries. His intention in writing this book has been to furnish an introduction to Greek theatre for the reader of Greek plays. Arnott describes the origin and structure of the Greek plays; he gives a description of the Greek theatre that shows his awareness in dealing with questions that cannot be entirely solved; he takes into account the type of audience who originally saw the plays.

Dr. Arnott presents an individual study of four plays: the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, the *Medea* of Euripides, and the only satyr play to be preserved complete—the *Cyclops* of Euripides. When Arnott considers Greek comedy, he uses *The Birds* by Aristophanes. After a clear exposition of these four widely different types of Greek drama and their production in their own time, Arnott shows what happened to drama in Rome. He quotes Horace who said, "Vanquished Greece subdued its savage captor." Arnott analyzes *The Menaechmi* by Plautus as a typical Roman theatre-piece.

A chapter on the problems of translation reveals again that Arnott is dealing with a subject in which he has had practical experience. He concludes with perceptive comparisons of ancient and modern Greek plays and with helpful hints on their production.

Arnott's Greek training is recent; his scholarship is modern. His versatility in translating and mounting Greek plays results in a reasonable attitude towards problems inherent in the texts and also strengthens him in his conviction that the modern producer must understand the conventional Greek theatre, and not try to use the illusionist methods so prevalent in the modern theatre. He finds the flamboyant styles of contemporary acting and production the complete antitheses of the simplicity that was ever present in the ancient Greek theatre.

The book has excellent plates of the ruins of ancient theatres. It also features illustrations of modern productions with Greek themes.

An Introduction to the Greek Theatre is for the general reader of Greek plays, for the young actor, and for the practical producer.

Martha Ryan Beck
Mercy College, Detroit

THE HEART OF HAMLET. By Bernard Grebanier. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1960; pp. 311. \$4.95

There is nothing more wrong with *The Heart of Hamlet* than that it was written by a man of literature rather than by a man of the theatre. Apparently goaded by the "crimes perpetrated" in the Olivier motion

picture against the playwright Shakespeare, Professor Grebanier has prepared a three-hundred-page attack against every self-styled Shakespearean scholar from Goethe to Eliot and then has fallen into his own pit with an elaborate phrase-by-phrase defense of his own theory.

His theory, simply, is that Hamlet is not insane and never pretends to be; and, furthermore, he is not indecisive, but acts as soon as he is convinced that the ghost was genuine and not some diabolical agent. Clearly his argument is with those critics who attribute Hamlet's *hamartia* to procrastination—due either to moral scruples, over-sensitivity, extreme introspection or to what have you. And, to this extent, the work is capable, if not especially unique. But, in his arguments that Hamlet does not pretend to be mad, he attributes his opponent's viewpoint to one quote from Act I, scene v:

As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on, . . .

and proceeds to demolish this interpretation with a somewhat strained and semantic set of arguments based predominantly on the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

But the dismissal of Hamlet's disarray when he burst in upon Ophelia is extremely weak and hinges upon Professor Grebanier's creation of a non-existent scene:

Can we not conceive him . . . flinging himself upon his couch without bothering to disrobe (though naturally without his hat on his head!), tossing about in anguished uncertainty—and then suddenly, with characteristic impulsiveness, jumping up, resolved to find out at once . . . whether or not she (Ophelia) is such another as Gertrude?

Professor Grebanier also dismisses the ego of the actor and the director in stating: "If it (*Hamlet*) were not a good play, actors would not be forever reviving it, and audiences would not be crowding theatres to see it even when Mr. Evans or Mr. Olivier assumes the role." I suggest to Professor Grebanier that I would go to see it precisely *because* Mr. Evans or Mr. Olivier assumed the role.

The author's analysis of tragedy in general in chapter two is excellent with the exception of his diagnosis of *katharsis*. In claiming that the Hebraic-Christian concept of spiritual cleansing is opposed to the Athenian, because the Hebraic-Christian concept is based on "the beating of the evil back into the heart" while the Greek concepts involves "letting the sin flow out of one's system," the Professor exposes a basically murky theology and distorts the nature of the "identification" a Christian feels toward Hamlet or Oedipus—the self-revelation of the identical flaw in

ourselves. Hamlet may be a Dane and a prince and given to introspection on occasion, but he is also given to anger, revenge, and pride—and here we are on a common ground, indeed.

All in all, there is a great deal that people of the theatre will find lacking in *The Heart of Hamlet* and much that literature teachers will endorse. He attacks Olivier and Margaret Webster ("There is not one 'right' *Hamlet* with all the others wrong!" is the phrase scorned by the author) and describes Gielgud as Shakespeare's Stokowski, not his Toscanini. He lauds Barrymore, ignoring that actor's amazing description of how he played *Hamlet* the way he did on that opening in London as reported in *Good Night, Sweet Prince*.

But the book has one great advantage. It is readable and provoking although it may leave you with the heartfelt wish that Alfred Drake and Joseph Papp (who endorsed it) would stick to *Kiss Me Kate* and *Shakespeare-in-the-park*.

George Herman
Villanova University, Philadelphia

HISTORICAL COSTUMES OF ENGLAND 1066-1956. By Nancy Bradfield. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1958; pp. 184. \$6.00.

Drawing on her inspirations, for the most part, from the originals in English galleries and museums, Nancy Bradfield has produced an impressive collection of historical illustrations. To the delight of the theatre designer, as well as to the serious student of historic costume, this stimulating work, first published in 1938, illustrates in its revision more than five hundred authentic costumes through careful line drawings. These new designs should prove invaluable to persons charged with stage costuming for men, women, or children.

Miss Bradfield has supplemented her seven-by-ten plates with a fine glossary of terms, useful marginal keywords, a careful index, and has capitalized upon an attractive, logical sequence of materials covering English history from the Norman Conquest to the present time.

To quote James Laver, eminent British theatre authority who wrote the foreword to both editions of *Historical Costumes of England*: "Her new edition, like the old one, takes its place as a most useful contribution to our grasp of the evolution of costume." One who examines the book thoughtfully must agree with Mr. Laver's high opinion.

Sister Mary Celeste, R.S.M.
Mercy College, Detroit

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